

with the idea that, since few settlements on Rapa Nui have been excavated, "far reaching conclusions are difficult to make."

All in all, this excellent volume is both Prologue and Future, providing an impetus for extended archaeological research sometime down the road. But any future archaeologists are hereby admonished that the field work done, the data collected, and the initial meaning and interpretation of this investigation; all have set a standard that future investigators would be wise to follow.



Easter Island. Archaeology, Ecology and Culture.

Jo Anne Van Tilburg. 1994. British Museum Press, 191 pp, 126 figs, 30 plates. £20.00; ISBN 0 7141 2504 0

Review by Paul G. Bahn

"No Tern Unstoned"

I read this book on a long train journey that, by chance, took me through the town of Tilburg in Holland. Tilburg looks fairly dull. The same cannot be said of Van Tilburg's book, but not, I'm afraid, for the right reasons, because it is so full of errors of every conceivable kind that spotting them becomes a distraction while reading it. I'll return to them shortly.

The front cover has a pleasant photograph of *moai* on the slopes of Rano Raraku--two appear to have birds on their heads. The back cover features Van Tilburg perched precariously on a step-ladder, involved in what at first sight seems a strange bondage ritual with a *moai*, but is in fact an exercise in photogrammetry. She is wearing the shorts and sunglasses so familiar to viewers of the various TV shows in which she has appeared and which are listed on the dustjacket (as the instigator of the BBC Horizon/Nova documentaries that launched her Rapa Nui televisual career, I must accept some responsibility here). The dustjacket blurb calls her, with as much accuracy as modesty, "the foremost authority on the subject", and also refers to "*moai* hidden deep in seaside caves" (some mistake, surely??) and to her simulated transportation of a "near fourteen-ton statue" (actually 12.5 metric tons). Did nobody check this dustjacket for accuracy?

The book begins with a jolly prologue that waxes lyrical about fieldwork on the island. After that, the chapters seem to have no logical sequence, and resemble a series of separate essays thrown in at random (and with a certain amount of repetition between them). The first gives a brief account of the Routledge expedition, followed by the history and development of her own project (as if the two are somehow equal or linked--apparently Van Tilburg has now even baptized her project "In the Wake of the *Mana*"! [p.18]), and then a general survey of *moai* statistics, her field of expertise, in an updated summary of her 1986 thesis. Chapter 2 starts deceptively with a normal account of the early European visits to the island, but after Cook it veers away into missionaries, traders, informants and oral traditions. Chapter 3 deals with island life, and the three phases of cultural development; No 4 focuses on the Birdman ritual, No 5 on

stone structures, No 6 on society, No 7 on hunger and astronomy, No 8 on aesthetics and *Rongorongo*, No 9 on the *moai* and No 10 on moving them. Why did nobody bother to give this book a coherent structure?

Right at the beginning. (on p.14), Van Tilburg states: "Katherine [Routledge] . . . was born . . . in 1880. She was a student at Somerville College, Oxford, from 1891 to 1895". I expect *RNJ* readers can spot a mistake here. Yet it is not a typographic error; on p.18 she states that Routledge died "in 1935 . . . aged fifty-five" (an error also published in her *H.M.S. Topaze* monograph, p. 5); and she says (p. 14) that Scoresby Routledge was born in 1883. Van Tilburg tells us at length and with evident pride of her in-depth research on Katherine Routledge and her empathy and admiration for her. It is odd, therefore, that she could commit such blunders. She may have read Routledge's notes, correspondence and will--but had she bothered to consult Katherine's death certificate or Scoresby's will or even Scoresby's obituary in the *Times* (all easily accessible in London) she would have discovered that Scoresby was born in Melbourne in 1859, and that Katherine was 69 when she died in 1935. Ironically, this means that when Katherine's book appeared in 1919 she was not 39 but roughly the same age as Van Tilburg is now! This may seem a small point to belabor here, but it has very important implications: for not only does Van Tilburg ignore the fact that, in a joint presentation on Routledge at Wyoming in 1993, Charlie Love and I gave the correct dates, but a number of eminent specialists apparently read this book (p.9) without spotting the ridiculous notion of an 11-year old girl attending an Oxford college in 1891. Worst of all, the dedication page of this volume claims that it is intended to mark the 80th anniversary of the *Mana* expedition, and "to honour the memory of Katherine Scoresby Routledge"! It is a pity that Van Tilburg's in-depth research on her heroine did not extend to the most basic of facts, and this, I'm afraid, is quite typical of the book as a whole.

It is, for example, riddled with typos or spelling errors--e.g. canes (for caves, p. 185), Chippendale (3 times), courtsey (p.88), diety (p. 172), Fiqueroa (p.166), Haddingham (p.9), Marguesas (p. 87), Moto Iti (p.171), Moto Nui (p.22), Owlsley (p.106), plaform (p.174), preceeded (p.130), Rano Kao (p.60--otherwise Kau throughout), *Scripus* (twice), Sommerville (p.15), trial (for trail, p. 181), etc. One or two typos are inevitable in a book, but this looks like sloppiness. Did nobody proofread this volume?

Then we have a series of words which Van Tilburg seems to think correct, but which I've been unable to find even in American dictionaries, such as arboculture (p.41), conflicted (as an adjective, p. 113), photogrammetrically (p. 148). The bibliography is equally careless, with, for example, errors in titles by Adam, Forment, Heine-Geldern, Peña, Roussel and Terrell, and McCoy 1979 listed twice under different initials. Again, did nobody proofread this book?

Any volume might have one photo slip through that is the wrong way round--here, the Museum of Mankind's wooden left hand (p.120); but it takes real genius for a full-page color plate of the view to the islets from the Orongo petroglyphs--

the most classic Easter Island shot--to be printed the wrong way round (plate 11)!

Now let us turn to other factual errors: first, birds. Van Tilburg is no ornithologist. She seems to think (p. 62) that all frigate birds, rather than just males, have an inflating red pouch! Far worse, on p.59 there is a photo captioned "Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) nesting on Motu Nui". It is, in fact, a fine specimen of a masked booby (*Sula dactylatra*). How could she get this wrong? The two birds are as alike as Foghorn Leghorn and the Roadrunner! Clearly, had Van Tilburg ever taken part in the Birdman competition, she would have picked up the wrong egg and collected a 'booby prize'!

Even more disturbing is a series of basic factual errors: for example, that the Spanish in 1770 raised "three wooden crosses on each of three. . . hillocks" (p.30)--that makes 9 crosses by my reckoning!; that Mangareva lies approximately 2,000 km to the east of Rapa Nui (p.46); on p.57 she states "The frigatebird is said to be associated with the Miru, although the distribution of frigatebird petroglyph motifs alone does substantiate that notion" (is there a word missing here?); on p.46 she claims that Chile lies 2,300 km to the east of Rapa Nui and Pitcairn 1,400 km to the west (the *National Geographic* map in plate 1 correctly gives these figures as miles); and on the same page she gives the island's area as 160 km², but on p. 86 it is 162 km² (and, as *RNJ* readers know from a recent issue [8:3, p.72], neither is correct--the official figure is 171 km²); and on p. 133 she claims that "only two sites, Anakena and Vinapu, have yielded fragments of *moai* eyes"--thus ignoring the work of Andrea Seelenfreund (she is not mentioned in the book) who in *Clava* 1988 (p.79) reported ten fragments of *moai* eyes in white pumice and white coral, plus a red disk, at *ahu* Tautira. Did nobody check this book for basic facts? The problem is that fundamental errors of this kind severely shake one's trust in an author's reliability in every other domain--can one trust, for example, her *moai* statistics or indeed anything else in this book?

Editing is another area that is highly unsatisfactory. The book contains a great deal of repetition or contradiction: for example, on p.168, in note 18, we are told that Cristino says the island has no sites earlier than AD 800, but note 21 refers to a date, reported to her by Cristino, of AD 600-800 for Anakena! On p.13, she refers to talk of the statues being "standardized" or "mass-produced" as "simplistic characterizations", but she herself repeatedly uses these very terms in relation to the *moai* (pp. 52,118,125). More serious is the constant assumption of prior knowledge on the part of readers: names such as La Pérouse (p. 32), Thomson (p. 33), Geiseler (p. 55) and even Motu Nui (p. 55) are thrown at the reader without the slightest explanation or identification. Even Métraux and Englert are never properly introduced. Alexander Salmon is mentioned twice (pp. 37, 46) but he is not identified in any way, and not even included in the index, so why bother naming him at all? On p. 115, the "Dong Son metal work of Roti" is cited, without the slightest explanation, as is the "Kon Tiki saga" on p. 165. Did nobody

bother to edit this book?

The author's interpretations are a further source of problems. This is a very personal book--indeed it is riddled with the phrases "in my view", "it is my opinion", "in my judgment", etc. Naturally she is entitled to her own interpretations of the evidence but, alas, she often makes unwarranted assumptions and suppositions, and even distorts the facts. For example, in her adopted scenario (see below), the arrival of Europeans had a devastating effect on the islanders; she clearly sees the Dutch as being the first visitors, and for maximum effect she needs them to have killed Rapa Nui leaders, since the death of sacred, hereditary leadership is known to have plunged other tribal societies into immense internal crises; so she claims (p. 29) that some of those killed by the Dutch were "certainly chiefs or priests". But in fact we have no idea at all who was killed--Roggeveen, Bouman and Behrens merely mention "inhabitants" and in no way imply that anyone in authority was even wounded. She believes (p. 60) that first fruits, initiation and fertility--so crucial to the Birdman rituals--were "very likely" primary foci in the statue cult, and that the *moai* were linked to agricultural rites (pp. 100, 127/8); but there is no evidence for this at all. She is ingenuous about archaeology's ability to estimate population and assess how many houses were occupied at the same time, and so fails to realize that her population estimate (p. 67) is as flimsy as everyone else's; similarly, she seems naively optimistic that the "history of the *hare paenga*" will be fully understood after more work (p. 72) and that we will eventually know about individual responses to hunger on Rapa Nui (p. 98). She sees the palm nut as a famine food (p. 98) but no evidence is given for this. She claims the equation of *mata'a* with a high level of warfare is "facile" (p. 109) and prefers to conjure up a theory of sham battles--yet fails to understand that this still indicates a huge rise in aggression.

Where her theory of *moai* transportation is concerned, the chapter is aptly titled "Beyond Belief". The dustjacket says her model is "exciting yet compellingly logical". In fact, she has merely been seduced by computers, and of course a simulation is far quicker and simpler than a proper experiment. Since her Wyoming presentation (see *RNJ* 7[3]:46) she has extended her model of horizontal transportation to coastal *ahu*, and realized that the statues would need to be prone and approach these *ahu* from the front; but she admits (p. 156) that prone transportation is very risky, expensive and complicated, and that erecting horizontal statues (p. 174, note 22) causes damage. Unlike in her recent *Archaeology* article, where Charlie Love's upright method is dismissed as having resulted in his *moai* falling, she concedes here (in a footnote, p. 174) that his method is viable although, at 45 m in 2 minutes, "slower" than the 1 m per second *hypothesized* for her computer method! The difference, of course, is between reality and theory. Van Tilburg proudly claims her hypothesis is "replicable and testable" (p. 158)--so why not test it? Until a facsimile *moai* has been moved in accordance with her model, all her figures and results remain pure fiction and should be treated as such.

Her dismissive attitude towards the experiments of Pavel and Love brings me to the thorny topic of her treatment of colleagues. The book is very heavily dependent on the (often unpublished) data and advice of a few--Vargas, Kaeppler, Green, Steadman, etc.--but is far less generous to others. Vignes is absent, although his article on *moai* eyes is still the only such study in print; Heyerdahl, whatever one thinks of his views, surely merits more than the single paragraph on p. 46 (e.g. her dismissal of South American influence in Rapa Nui sculpture on pp. 130/1 is vague and unsatisfactory, nor does she provide any source for her New World data); and it is simply outrageous that in a book on Easter Island, with "Ecology" in its subtitle, the seminal work of John Flenley is accorded one brief mention on p. 47--on the next page she states that the *totoro* reed has been on the island for over 30,000 years, but gives no source for this information, nor for any later mentions of deforestation or lack of palm wood.

Even worse is the complete absence of Steven Fischer's 1993 edited volume *Easter Island Studies*, the most up-to-date survey of the subject--this was not caused by its date, since her book contains photos and personal communications from 1994; and the *Rapa Nui Journal* merits only two mentions--one for an 8-line obituary she sent in (p. 166), the other for a 1993 article by Finney. Apparently this "foremost authority" sees nothing of any value--not even Chris Stevenson's excavation reports--in what Grant McCall, in the 2nd edition of his excellent book, *Rapanui*, calls "the foremost serial publication in Easter Island studies." Why? It's another of Easter Island's mysteries.

Yet by taking these decisions, Van Tilburg has shot herself in the foot. For example, since George Gill's recent work is only available in *RNJ* articles and the Fischer volume, her osteological data for endogamy (p. 110) are given no source, and the craniometric data (p. 104) come from an abstract more than ten years old! By omitting Gill's latest results, however, she can agree with Green (p. 43) that it is "extremely doubtful that Easter Island was settled from the Marquesas".

It is not easy to write a book that is both popular and scholarly and Van Tilburg has failed on both fronts. Her book is not popular because it assumes far too much prior knowledge (see above), and it will alienate readers through her love of obscure and pretentious verbiage like "metonymic connection" or "theophanic construct", and her often dry anthropological discussions and diagrams. And for all its trappings of detailed footnotes and references, this is not a scholarly work because of its myriad errors and its extraordinarily pusillanimous treatment, and Heyerdahlesque ignoring, of other researchers.

The book does have good points, such as some fine illustrations, many of them old and little known; and the footnotes and the links/comparisons made with other parts of the Pacific are not without interest. But in the end one has to ask oneself why the book was produced, what is its *raison d'être*--and the answer seems to be merely that its author was determined to write a book on Easter Island. She was hitherto known simply for her thesis, a few articles and a small

monograph on the island's statues, which she has measured and described in detail. Writing a book on all aspects of the island's archaeology and culture, however, is a very different matter. Her book has little new information, and no real message except that the islanders were Polynesians, their culture shows lots of Polynesian traits, and they coped well with change. Nothing very new or controversial there.

Yet she seems desperate to offer off-beat views such as (p. 82) that the toppling and reworking of the *moai* might be religious rather than due to aggression, or that the *mata'a* do not necessarily denote violence (see above). She seems primarily concerned (p. 164) to shift the blame for cultural collapse onto the "fatal impact" of the Europeans, but it remains a fact that the island was deforested and in deep trouble by the time they turned up. Van Tilburg emphasizes and sees the islanders' cultural achievement rather than failure (p. 165)--but contrary to her claims, nobody "ignores or denies" the social restructuring and readjustment strategies of Rapa Nui (see, e.g., Bahn and Flenley p. 218). She insists that Flenley's model "remains to be demonstrated" (p. 174)--of course it does, like any other model in archaeology including that of *moai* transportation, but at least Flenley has solid scientific data on his side, and Steadman's new information seems to fit the picture well. Van Tilburg, on the other hand, is merely vague, even about population levels, and her book is remarkably muted about the details of ecological devastation.

It is paradoxical, therefore, that despite her determination to see the islanders through rose-tinted sunglasses, she accepts all rumors of cannibalism without a hint of doubt--she claims (p. 109) that "the archaeological evidence for cannibalism is present on a few sites" and that (p. 110) "apparent remains of cannibalistic activities are known on Rapa Nui from both ceremonial and non-ceremonial contexts"; but she never tells us what this evidence is--hardly surprising, since of course apart from highly ambiguous bits of burned and/or cut bone there is no real archaeological evidence for the practice on the island, merely oral traditions. The perpetuation of unsubstantiated and reckless interpretations of this kind is simply irresponsible and symptomatic of the book as a whole. One is left wondering why on earth the British Museum Press did not get the manuscript written, checked, edited and proofread to an acceptable and competent standard.

In our review of Grahame Walsh's book (*Bradshaws: Ancient Rock Paintings of North-West Australia*) *RNJ* 8(4):109-10, the address of the publisher should read PO Box 1827, 1277 Carouge, Geneva, Switzerland (not PO Box 1204). For a refreshing change, this was the publisher's misprint, not one of our (many) glitches.